

VZCZCXRO9652
PP RUEHPA RUEHTRO
DE RUEHNK #0221/01 0841523
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 251523Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8255
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMGH/MAGHREB COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000221

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/24/2019
TAGS: [OTRA](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CVIS](#) [MR](#)
SUBJECT: DELAYS OBTAINING MAURITANIAN VISAS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The military junta is delaying issuance of visas to American and European citizens. There have been no reports of visa applications actually being denied, but in many cases the delays have lasted well over a month. All visa applications made at Mauritanian embassies in the United States and European countries must now be submitted to the MFA for approval. There are no indications that the delays are due to heightened security concerns. The French, German and Spanish consuls in Mauritania speculate that the delays are in retaliation for actions taken by their governments since the coup such as the implementation of a ten day consultation period before Schengen visas can be issued to Mauritanians. The junta may be retaliating against Americans because the USG prudentially revoked three visas since the coup, including one held by General Aziz. However, post continues to issue visas in the same timeframe as it did before the coup in almost all cases. The junta may also be trying to prevent

Western journalists and human rights activists from coming to Mauritania that might portray the junta in a bad light. Post recommends that all official visitors request Mauritanian visas well in advance of their planned dates of travel. Post can still obtain airport visas for visitors when necessary, but prefers to minimize contact with host government officials to the extent possible given the current political situation. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) The military junta is delaying issuance of visas to American and European citizens. Initially, the delays appeared only to effect private citizens. Official and diplomatic visas were still being delivered in a timely manner, normally less than a week. The High State Council (HSC) now appears to be delaying delivery of diplomatic and official visas too. Before the coup, each Mauritanian embassy abroad was able to issue visas independently without consulting the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Now, certain Mauritanian embassies, specifically those in the United States and Europe, must submit all visa requests to the MFA to obtain its authorization before issuing the visa.

¶3. (SBU) Post has received reports from both official and private Americans that they have experienced significant delays in obtaining Mauritanian visas. The consuls from all three European embassies in Mauritania (France, Germany and Spain) told ConOff that both private and official visitors from the EU were also having difficulty obtaining Mauritanian visas. While there are no reports of any visa requests actually being refused, the delays are becoming more onerous.

Prior to the coup it was normally possible to obtain a Mauritanian visa in less than a week, but it now takes several weeks and in many cases well over a month. The dates of travel indicated on the visa application form do not appear to have any effect on when the visa is issued. In many cases, visitors have had to rearrange travel plans because they were not able to obtain the visa by their planned date of travel. In contrast to the difficulties that

Americans and Europeans are having in obtaining visas, diplomats from other Arab countries with representation in Mauritania told ConOff that their citizens continue to be able to obtain Mauritanian visas without delay.

14. (C) The reasons for the increasing delays are unclear. There are no indications that the move to centralize visa issuance at the MFA is due to heightened security concerns. Citizens from ECOWAS countries continue to be able to enter Mauritania without a visa. Citizens from other Arab countries, whom one might expect to pose the greatest concerns about security and terrorism, continue to receive visas without delay. The MFA is not known to have any sort of name checking system that it uses before issuing visas.

15. (C) The European consuls suspect that the delays are retaliation on the part of the junta against their own visa issuance policies since the coup. Prior to the coup, the French, Germany and Spanish embassies were normally able to issue Schengen visas to Mauritanian citizens within a day of receiving the application. Since the coup, German Consul Hans Lamprecht said that the Government of Germany has put Mauritania on its "consultation list," meaning that all Mauritanian requests for Schengen visas must be approved by an interagency process in the German government. The result has been a 10 day delay for the issuance of Schengen visas to Mauritanian citizens. The junta may also be retaliating against the United States for the travel restrictions that the USG placed on members of the HSC, junta-appointed government, and other Mauritians impeding the return to constitutionality. To date, the USG has prudentially revoked three visas issued to Mauritians, including General Aziz.

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However, in almost all other cases, post has continued to issue visas in the same timeframe that it did prior to the coup. There have only been a few visa requests from coup supporters where issuance has been delayed pending Department approval. In addition, there have been several questionable G-3 and A-2 visa applications for support staff that are currently pending advisory opinions from the Department. This has been a long standing problem with the Mauritanian missions in the United States, but one that was largely brought under control during Ambassador Dia's tenure. Now that Dia has effectively been pushed out of the Embassy, the problems have resumed.

16. (SBU) A Mauritanian anti-coup media outlet suggested that the junta is concerned about Western journalists and human rights activists visiting Mauritania who might portray the junta in a poor light. As a result, the junta may be trying to implement a vetting process to identify such visitors. The most significant delays have occurred since the December 2008 release of a report on torture in Mauritania by Amnesty International and a visit by a New York Times correspondent who was briefly detained by police during his visit. However, it is not certain if the two events demonstrate causality or are merely coincidence.

17. (SBU) Post recommends that all official visitors request visas well in advance of their planned travel to ensure that they will be able to arrive on time. Post has already had several visitors who have had to reschedule their visits because they were not able to obtain visas in time. Post is still able to obtain airport visas for visitors in a timely manner and European embassies report that a phone call to the protocol office at the MFA usually ensures that a visa is issued in time. However, post is trying to minimize contact with Mauritanian authorities to the extent possible given the current political situation. As a result, post can obtain airport visas for official visitors when necessary but prefers to limit this practice as much as possible.

HANKINS